

The horseshoe crab

The Atlantic horseshoe crabs are chelicerate arthropods that, despite their name, are closer to spiders and scorpions than to crabs.

The scientific name of the species is *Limulus polyphemus*, which belongs to the oldest animal group still living on Earth (Merostomata) that appeared about 400 million years ago. This species is considered a living fossil because it has evolved very little during the last 250 million years.

The species average life span is 20 to 40 years. It inhabits the Western Atlantic, along the eastern coast of the United States of America, to the Gulf of Mexico.

During the breeding season these animals arrive, by the thousands, at high tides of new and full moon nights to the beaches to spawn. Females put on average 20,000 eggs in potholes made by them in the beach sand; the larvae hatch after two weeks. Juvenile horseshoe crabs usually spend the first two years of life in coastal marine waters, where the food is plentiful and salinity is low. They then migrate to deeper waters, where they remain until they become adults and are ready to reproduce.

Horseshoe crabs have the ability to regenerate their limbs as do, for example, starfishes. They have several dorsal eyes, two compound eyes used especially to find partners, and the others adapted for circadian synchronization and visual processing of information. They also have two simple ventral eyes that help the animal to orientate itself during its displacement.

This species is considered vulnerable in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. However, because of the antibacterial properties of their “blue-blood” (haemolymph) these animals are widely used by the pharmaceutical industry. They are captured for blood extraction, which can provide an income of 2000-3000 Euros per individual. Although the animals are returned to nature they present mortalities between 10-15%.



Caranguejo-ferradura | Horseshoe crab
Limulus polyphemus (Linnaeus, 1758)
Local e data desconhecidos | Locality and date unknown
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